

Analysis on the novel, waiting by ha jin essay sample

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



Ha Jin was born in 1956 in Liaoning, China where he spent his childhood during the Cultural Revolution. When he was fourteen, he joined and served the People's Liberation Army for six years. This allowed him to experience the suffering lives of the people during that time, and so he learned of their culture and their thoughts and habits. Having experienced this first-hand, Ha Jin had built the background of his future writings. He left China in 1985 for the United States to further study English literature, and earned a PhD.

His works include two award-winning collections of stories, some poetry and the novel *Waiting*, which is the winner of the 1999 National Book Award for Fiction and also is the winner of the 2000 PEN/Faulkner award. *Waiting* is set in the time of the Cultural Revolution, based on a story that his wife told him the first he went to meet his in-laws (since they served in an army hospital). It tells a story about Lin Kong, a doctor practicing at an Army hospital in Muji City in China.

There he has fallen in love with Manna Wu, a modern urban woman who works as a nurse in the same hospital. But Shuyu, his country wife in Goose Village refuses to divorce him, though besides Hua, their daughter, there is no love in their arranged marriage. The moral Communist society forces Lin and Manna to suppress their love until Shuyu grants the divorce. So the couple is forced to wait for 18 long years until the court finally grants the divorce. Hence, the title *Waiting*. My task today is to show how Ha Jin is able to achieve universality in his novel.

What I mean by universality, is that there is an idea which is shown approval by people all around the world, and that Ha Jin is able to grasp that universal

idea, even though he is a Chinese author and *Waiting* has Chinese characters and set in a Chinese background. We'll start with the structure of the novel. The novel is composed of a prologue and three parts. The prologue introduces the story of the unsuccessful divorces and the reason behind that. The three parts each has chapters depicting short scenes in the characters' lives.

The first part is framed from the end of 1963 to the end of 1970. Part two is framed from 1972 to 1984. These two parts illustrate the difficulties and barriers that Lin and Manna have to face in order to get married. While part three illustrates that after 18 years of waiting, even though they do get married, they have to face many more problems and confusions about their choice. There are three main characters in the novel: Shuyu, Lin and Manna. They are symbols and archetypes of certain aspects in China.

An archetype here means an ideal example of a type or group. Shuyu is the symbol of old China. She lives in the countryside and follows the thoughts of a traditional Chinese woman, who obeys to everything her man orders. As a simple, uneducated woman with bounded feet, she is the archetype of oppressed women in the society of that time, around the 1960's. An example of her obedience would be in Part Three, when she has already moved into the city. She moved there because Lin asked her to and when he asks her to tell the judge that she wants Hua to have a job in the city, she answers simply with " Okay, I'll do it". No struggle or defence.

Thus she can be taken as a sacrifice so that the old China can develop into a new one. - Lin is the archetype of the people and is the symbol of transitional China. He moves away from the countryside into the city and looks for new ways to improve his life. The most obvious one is that he embraces love, Manna. But he does not really know what he wants, since he has no love for Shuyu but is confused about whether he wants to marry Manna. He leaves the old life with his wife behind, or rather, he tries to, and he strives to start a new life with Manna. Thus the long wait of 18 years for change begins. Manna is the representation of the new China.

She is the archetype of modern women, bright, well-mannered, demanding, strong and quick. She has learned the new ways of thinking, so she does not take orders from Lin. But she presents herself as a sacrifice so that Lin can reach for the new China. Unfortunately that sacrifice spreads itself over 18 years and in the end, Lin and Manna are still trapped in a framing device of time because Manna is to die of a poor heart, and though they sacrificed so much time for their marriage, they do not have much time left to live it.

The reader comes to realise is that the framing device mentioned creates the time frame of the story, not with a certain date in time but a time frame which traps in all the characters. This can be seen from the first line in the prologue " Every summer Lin Kong returned to Goose village to divorce his wife, Shuyu" and the last two lines of Part Three " Outside, Manna was cheerfully wishing " Happy Spring Festival" to someone passing by. She sounded so pleasant that Lin noticed her voice was still resonant with life".

The reader will realise that the novel starts and ends with an action that Lin does, but after 18 years long of dragging, he is just as unsatisfied with his life. Now for the style and tone of the language used in the Novel. Waiting is written in English, but English is Ha Jin's second language, so even though Waiting was written many years after he went to United States, there is still a sense of Chinese spirit within. For instance, many Chinese terms are used after being translated into English like "Golden Lotus" from Part Three, chapter one, describing bound feet.

As the old saying was "Every pair of lotus feet come from a bucket of tears". Even the dialogue is held in the means of the Chinese language. For instance, in Part Two, chapter three, a toothless crone states that "Even an emperor isn't free to divorce his wife" and an old man retorts that "A woman shouldn't be allowed to divorce either, or else there'll be disorder everywhere. The order of the world is rooted in every family, as Confucius said." But for Ha Jin, language was not a problem. He, who was once a Red Army soldier, is able to provide vivid imagery of the scenes using very simple language.

Here are two examples of simple language used to describe nature scenes: the first one is the scene of the march in the winter of 1966 from Part One, chapter three; it describes the work going on in the pale moonlight, and that "stars glittered like brass nuggets above the pine woods that were swaying wave after wave in the south". The second example is in Part two, chapter 11, after Manna has told Lin that she was raped by Geng Yang, "A swarm of

sparrows drifted past like a floating net and then disappeared in the leafless branches of a willow”.

These beautifully detailed scenes are realistic, told in very direct and stripped down language. A combination of this simple language with the imagery, allows the reader to feel the characters' frustrations. Describing nature is a tool that Ha Jin applied to when Lin runs into a problem and this creates a sense of silence, a time for thinking, allowing the reader to feel that he is watching the scene from Lin's very own eyes. Though the story itself is sometimes irritating slow, it actually builds up a tension as we wait for Shuyu to let Lin go.

Last but not least, there are the themes in the book: the first one I'll talk about is political issues versus love. “ Politics can devastate love” The political allegory in the novel is shown through the characters themselves, since it is through Lin and Manna's love that the reader sees how suppressive the government and thus the traditional family was during the Cultural Revolution. The political issues include power and hierarchy. Society does not allow Lin and Manna to show their love to each other because Lin is married to Shuyu.

So though Lin loves Manna, he is unable to protect her with his love. The following two incidents are examples of this devastation regarding political issues: 1. The first example occurs in Part Two. Commissar Wei has used his status in the hierarchy to ask for a suitable woman in the hospital to marry so she can take care of his health. Lin has to unwillingly give up Manna

because first, he is a married man and society does not allow one man to have two lovers, and secondly Commissar Wei is his senior, he is of higher rank, so Lin cannot possibly oppose him.

Now, most people believe that Lin loves Manna, that's why he wants to divorce Shuyu, but through this incident, some might think that he doesn't love her enough so he gives her up. They may think that because he made up his mind quite quickly about letting her go, which is shown in Part Two, Chapter 4 (page 136), where he says " Perhaps this will do her good. If Commissar Wei agrees to marry her, that will be fine with me".

But if we go through his internal conflicts about this situation briefly, we will soon understand that he first remains silent because he must suppress his feelings and also, that he is not an irrational man, that he has thought over it and gives her up for her own good. It is even clearer that he is a man of thoughts when he agrees to write the report on the poems for her, shown in Part Two, Chapter 5 (page 152), where he actually states that he feels the irony of why he felt " a kind of serenity" in him and " why he didn't act like most men in love, who would try every means to keep their women".

Suppressing his love until he is no longer able to struggle, this is the kind of devastation that Lin has to go through because of hierarchy. 2. The second example occurs in Part Three. When Lin finds out that Geng Yang has raped Manna, he realises that " Geng Yang has taken advantage of his inability to develop his relationship with Manna". He must blame himself for telling Geng

Yang that she was a virgin, just because he thought that Geng Yang was a respectable senior.

This is the guilt and devastation that he has to hold responsibility for, for putting his love through what could be her worst nightmare. Just a reminder that the political issues include power, besides the Communist Party and the court, in the countryside Shuyu's brother Bensheng has power over Lin because Lin does not live there anymore and it is Bensheng who understands his sister's situation. By standing up for his sister in court, he is able to prevent Lin from revealing his love to Manna in the city, because the court once again declines his request for divorce.

And Lin has to put up with that, because Bensheng is still a part of his family. The second theme I would like to talk about is waiting. No matter whom it is or where he/she is, all the characters in the novel are waiting. Shuyu is waiting for her husband. Hua is waiting for her father. Lin is waiting for Shuyu's grant for divorce and Manna is waiting for Lin to marry her. It seems as though the waiting will never end. And it never does. Though there is a framing device in the story, in the end, Lin finds himself confused with whether he really loves Manna or not.

In Part three, chapter 11, there is a huge section just of Lin's internal conflicts. This shows his frustration of not understanding himself over the years. He says to himself " No, time may prove nothing. Actually you never loved her. You just had a crush on her, which you didn't get a chance to outgrow or to develop into love. " He continues to say " In fact you waited

eighteen years just for the sake of waiting. " And a sudden realisation overcomes him when " the voice went on, Yes, you waited so many years, but for what? and he couldn't answer.

Towards the end, Lin predicts that Manna will die soon and asks Shuyu and Hua to wait for him. But the last line of the story " She sounded so pleasant that Lin noticed her voice was still resonant with life" suggests that Manna might not die so soon, and so in the end, everyone will continue on waiting. Now we come back to the task on hand. How does Ha Jin achieve universality? * First of all, one of the themes is love... love just keeps happening, is that good or is that bad?

Who knows? And compared to what can you say it is good or bad? Since there are so many unknown things, we can only conclude that everyone falls in love. It's a fact. Man and woman fall in love. This is one of the universal appeals that Ha Jin uses in the novel and by applying it as a theme, he has achieved the universal idea that love goes on, leaving time behind. * Secondly, there are the symbols and the structure of the novel, which represent time.

The main characters are direct representations of a framing device. In the novel, the characters are given time and opportunity to self-discover, but because they are so wrapped up with waiting for someone or something, they miss the wonderful opportunity to do so. Now, life seems like a one-way road, where in the beginning we are born and in the end, we die. But life is a

cycle, while we live we try to share with others, and love gives a meaning and purpose to share until you reach the last stop at the grave.

So your time in life is the second universal idea that Ha Jin has fused into the novel, and he has done that through the theme of waiting, the representations of the characters and the structure of the novel itself. To conclude this presentation, that very short summary of life, about how life is a cycle, shows us how well this Chinese author has been able to reach universality through the aspect of where our existence is naturally to be born, to take a journey through time, to love and to die.